



Press Clipping Article

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Kentucky has pumped tens of millions of dollars of government aid into retrofitting small farms for a post-tobacco future -- everything from helping them buy choice papa bulls to obtaining root stock for starting vineyards and orchards.

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Kentucky has pumped tens of millions of dollars of government aid into retrofitting small farms for a post-tobacco future -- everything from helping them buy choice papa bulls to obtaining root stock for starting vineyards and orchards.

What small farms need most, however, is access to markets. And things get more complicated when it comes to providing that.

Two cases in point:

- The state parks food services director who did more than anyone to promote state purchase of food from Kentucky farms has left with no explanation, apparently because he was fired.

The weekly Farmers Pride reports that agriculture officials have gotten assurances that the state parks will keep buying Kentucky-grown food.

But with Bob Perry gone, farmers are understandably skeptical. Under Perry, state parks were starting to buy enough locally produced beef to cut into traditional suppliers' business.

Perry cut through years of inertia and red tape to demonstrate that Kentucky's parks can serve the best from Kentucky's farms at no extra cost.

Other government agencies, schools and universities can and should do the same.

House Bill 669, sponsored by Rep. Adrian Arnold, D-Mount Sterling, would require state agencies to buy Kentucky-produced agricultural products when the price and quality are equal to what is otherwise available.

This bill, which comes up in committee today, should be a no-brainer for lawmakers who have already invested so much of the public's tobacco settlement money in small farms.

- Speaking of the public's money, Kentucky's farm-based winemakers are being tempted to trade part of their toehold on the market for a \$1 million handout. To their credit, most are saying no to Senate Bill 82.

They doubt the legislature can or should divert money from the General Fund to wineries. More important, their long-term future means more than a quick windfall. So they're defending a provision in state law that lets small wineries bypass the traditional alcohol distribution system and sell directly to retailers.

A U.S. Supreme Court ruling is pressuring the legislature to treat out-of-state wineries the same as their Kentucky counterparts. This does not require harming Kentucky's fledgling vineyards, as SB 82 would do.

It's a matter of licensing farm-based wineries in other states to sell directly to Kentucky retailers and enacting cross-state equality in mail-order sales of wine.

Environmental and Public Protection Secretary LaJuana Wilcher should put the legal minds in Alcoholic Beverage Control to work on compromise legislation.

Kentucky farms struggling to start something new shouldn't have their legs knocked out from under them by a state government that claims to be their friend.

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